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ABSTRACT

The purpose of (Colorado's) Clear Creek School District's strategic planning process has been to develop basic district-wide parameters to promote instructional improvement through a process of shared leadership. The approach is termed "sight-based" to indicate the school district's commitment to connecting curriculum and staff-development programs with an overall district vision. The process provides for a needs assessment to be conducted not less than every 2 years and requires a 3- to 5-year strategic plan. Governance for the several components of this program includes shared leadership with students, parents, nonparent citizens, and educators. All certificated staff participate in the process at some stage, and many support staff are also involved. One central activity is a staff development program, "Enhancing Instructional Delivery" (EID), developed by a committee of teachers and administrators. The EID program is designed to focus the attention of teachers and other certificated employees on the teaching/learning process as it exists in the district's schools. A description is given of the activities and topics covered in the five-day program. A description of the five-step process used to establish short-term goals for the district is appended. (JD)

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STRATEGIC PLANNING: A ~~SITE~~ SIGHT-BASED APPROACH TO CURRICULUM AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

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Strategic Planning: A ~~Site~~ Sight-based Approach
to
Curriculum and Staff Development

I. Background

After decades of school district consolidation, American public schools seem to be shifting from a concept of "Big is Beautiful" to "Small is Smart". Like U. S. business leaders who have discovered that large organizations are often slow to test new ideas, often biased toward conceptual research rather than application, and generally shackled by ponderous planning systems and large projects (Peters; 1987), public school leaders are attempting to return decision making to the local level through shared leadership and site-based management. Yet, as Saphier, Bigda-Peyton, and Pierson (1989) point out, the move toward shared leadership in the public schools will not in itself solve the problems facing education today either in terms of meeting the demands of a rapidly changing society or even in coping with the complexities of change within the schools themselves. Meaningful and long lasting change, they suggest, depends on the structures employed as a part of the change process.

In a paper presented to the National Council of States on Inservice Education in 1989, I proposed a structure for school improvement based on four questions: 1) Why do we exist - our mission, philosophy, and goals? 2) What do we do to accomplish our mission - our curriculum? 3) How do we deliver the curriculum - instructional improvement? and 4) To what extent are we accomplishing our mission - evaluation? (Johnson; 1989). In that paper Clear Creek School District's strategic planning model was discussed in terms of the first two of these four questions - why and what/mission

and curriculum. Moving to the next phase of the model, this paper focuses on how the curriculum is delivered, i.e., instructional improvement through staff development. The paper is divided into three parts: 1) The Strategic Planning Process, 2) Enhancing Instructional Delivery, and 3) Results, Implications, and Conclusions.

II. The Strategic Planning Process

The purpose of Clear Creek School District's strategic planning process has been to develop basic districtwide parameters to promote instructional improvement through a process of shared leadership. The term "sight-based" in the title indicates the school district's strong commitment to connecting curriculum and staff development programs to an overall district vision. This vision is one of providing successful learning experiences for all students through teaching/learning options. Wherever possible, these options are offered as a part of the existing program through modification of teaching strategies. If necessary, new programs are developed to meet identified student needs, and in some instances the district relies on community and higher education agencies to provide needed services.

The planning process itself (See Appendix A) has been designed, implemented, and managed by Clear Creek School District personnel. The state classifies this K-12 district of 1450 students in the outlying town funding category. Clear Creek County, with an area of 395 square miles, is located approximately 40 minutes west of Denver.

The planning process evolved as a result of a 1986 needs assessment conducted by

the District Accountability Advisory Committee (DAAC), a group of students, parents, non-parent citizens, and educators, at the request of the Board of Education. Data from that needs assessment and from informal assessments conducted by Board members indicated a lack of program articulation, no written curriculum, no mission, philosophy, or goals to guide the district, inadequate emphasis on career guidance and planning for students, lack of systematic staff development, and a shortage of options for students who were "out of sync" with the regular classroom (whether at-risk or gifted).

In 1987 the Board adopted the planning process as proposed by the DAAC and the superintendent to help correct some of these problems. The process provides for a needs assessment to be conducted not less than every two years and requires a three to five year strategic plan. Each year Building Accountability Advisory Committees (BAAC) work with the principal to develop a building action plan for the coming year. The plan consists of two to three goals related to state goals and/or other building needs and includes outcomes, activities, time-lines, and methods of evaluating goal achievement. After being reviewed by the DAAC and the superintendent, these plans are presented to the Board for approval.

Governance for the several components of this program includes shared leadership with students, parents, non-parent citizens, and educators. All recommendations are processed through the administration with final approval by the Board of Education. All certificated staff participate in the process at some stage, and many support staff are also involved.

As a first step toward implementing this strategic planning process, the DAAC

began formulating a mission statement for the school district in 1987. With input from students, parents, non-parent citizens, and educators, the DAAC presented their proposals for mission, philosophy, and goal statements to the Board in 1988. At the same time, the professional staff, which was organized into K-12 subject area committees, began mapping their unwritten curriculum to prepare a written list of strands, concepts, and expected learning outcomes for each existing course. The "why" questions of mission, philosophy, and goals were thus considered to be a decision making opportunity for the total school community; whereas, the professional staff was charged with decision making relative to the curriculum.

With these two projects completed, during the 1988-89 school year the DAAC was charged by the Board to assist the superintendent in developing a three year strategic plan for school climate, continued curriculum development, staff development, and facilities. That same year each building developed an action plan relative to these areas. K-12 subject area committees began monitoring implementation of the curriculum and amassing lists of resources and activities available for each subject strand. A committee of teachers and administrators also began planning a staff development program, Enhancing Instructional Delivery, based on the expectations created for teachers by the newly developed mission and curriculum. During the second semester this staff development program was implemented with two different groups of 12 volunteer teachers. The program is described in the following section.

III. Enhancing Instructional Delivery

Enhancing Instructional Delivery (EID) is a program designed to focus the attention of teachers and other certificated employees on the teaching/learning process as it exists in our schools. From birth individuals are involved in learning. In fact, individuals learn more in the first five years of life, and from there on outside of school, than they could ever hope to learn in 13 years of public education. Therefore, as the EID committee designed a staff development program to improve instruction, they had to determine the role that public schools should play in this overall learning process. Drawing from the school district mission, the committee designed a program consistent with the assumption that schools exist to enrich all children's levels of experience, to guide that experience in a positive manner, and to help students on the basis of that experience to analyze how they learn so that they will become life-long, autonomous learners. According to this definition, teaching is a process of taking a person from an existing point of cognitive/affective/psycho-motor development to a newer (and hopefully higher) plane. Although learning exists in varying degrees, EID focuses on those knowledges, skills, and processes that learners have committed to their long term memory, i.e., they have the facility to draw on and apply that learning to new situations. Toward that end the EID program has been structured to make teachers aware of an array of educational research and instructional innovations which provide options to enhance learning for all students.

A second assumption of the EID committee was that the vast majority of Clear

Creek teachers are currently delivering a quality educational program. However, the committee also recognized that our profession is rapidly expanding its understanding of effective teaching/learning strategies and that the demands of an increasingly technological society are altering the definition of "basics" in education. Consequently, the committee attempted to develop a process to examine some of these new demands and new teaching/learning strategies in a safe, professional environment based on a presentation, demonstration, guided practice, coaching model.

Research on various professional growth programs indicates that when teachers are merely exposed through lectures and demonstrations to new instructional strategies, few of them will ever apply those strategies in the classroom. Even when the strategies are modeled and participants are provided opportunities for guided practice, less than 50% ever surface in actual classroom use. However, when these strategies, once introduced, modeled, and practiced, are followed up with coaching and support in the classroom, nearly 90% will be applied regularly as a part of the teaching/learning process (ASCD; 1987).

Based on this research, we have designed the EID Program to maximize the potential for classroom application. Each module of the program is presented and modeled for participants. We first state our objective for the day's activities, present our information, model effective strategies, and provide guided practice during the session to monitor participants' understanding of the concepts. We attempt to present concepts and information in terms of various learning styles and modalities and follow each session with classroom coaching by administrators.

After each of the first three sessions coaching takes the form of planning and diagnosis. For example, after the 4-MAT session participants are asked to begin thinking about an instructional unit (preferably one they have already taught at some time) to be redesigned according to the 4-MAT model. Although that unit is not completed until the fourth week of the program, an administrator meets with participants following the first session to help them begin their work and to answer any questions they might have. Likewise, following the second session an administrator meets with participants during a planning period to help them plan a specific lesson using task analysis and diagnosis and prescription techniques.

It is not until the fourth session, instruction, that an administrator actually observes participants in the classroom. Moreover, since the EID program is designed to encourage participants to try new teaching strategies, only the participants themselves receive a copy of any coaching feedback. Absolutely none of the information from the EID program becomes a part of an individual's personnel record. This is a coaching situation where we can learn together both from our successes and from our blunders.

At the end of each session participants are asked to evaluate both the presenter and the concepts presented in terms of their effectiveness and practicality. Because presenters are learning along with the participants, we seek their opinions about what did or did not work so that we can improve the program for future participants. The EID committee stresses that we are not a group of experts; nor do we pretend to have all of the answers. We are merely a group of professionals who have explored several very promising areas of instructional theory and practice, and we want to share them with

other members of our staff.

The EID program consists of an introductory overview followed by five modules: learning styles and modalities, planning, child development, instruction, and collaboration. One week prior to the first EID session, participants meet for one hour to hear an overview of the program, review the EID schedule, receive materials, and schedule their own learning styles assessment.

To encourage collaboration and peer support, the twelve participants in each session generally include at least two teachers from each building. These people participate in five sessions over a five week period with Day 1 meeting on a Monday, Day 2 on Tuesday of the following week, and so forth through five weeks. This schedule avoids having teachers miss the same day's classes for five consecutive weeks, and it allows seven days for teachers to review and practice key concepts from each session. For the sake of continuity, an attempt is made to secure the services of the same substitute teacher for each participant on all five days. The first half-hour of each session is set aside for questions and comments regarding the previous session and/or problems participants may have encountered as they began implementing some of the strategies from that session.

Day 1 begins with a two hour overview of learning styles based on Marching to Different Drummers (Guild & Garger; 1988), a book which has been provided to participants at the introductory session. Participants receive feedback on their own learning styles and review some of the major research findings in this area. Then for the remainder of Day 1 and the morning of Day 2 they focus exclusively on Bernice

McCarthy's 4-MAT System wherein teachers plan a unit of instruction according to the manner in which various students perceive and process information. The basic premise of the 4-MAT model is that teachers cannot hope to respond to each child's individual learning style in every lesson. Moreover, since we all must learn and work under various conditions, the 4-MAT model is based on the assumption that it would be counterproductive in the long run to teach only to a person's preferred style of learning. Therefore, the 4-MAT model identifies four basic types of learners according to the manner in which they perceive and process information. Then the unit is planned so that the information is presented through each of the four learning style dimensions. In this way children spend at least some time during the unit learning according to their preferred learning style. At the same time, they are exposed to the other three learning style dimensions in an effort to enhance their ability to perceive and process information in various situations (McCarthy; 1987).

During the afternoon of Day 2, we move to the second module, planning, and our attention shifts slightly from the learner to the material to be learned. This module begins with an analysis of an instructional objective, focusing on the necessity to state the objective clearly and to include several key elements in the statement of the objective - the learning, the conditions under which the learning is to take place, and the level of expected achievement. Following this brief exercise on learning objectives, participants examine learning activities in terms of critical attributes and perform a task analysis on same, i.e., breakdown the objective into those skills which are prerequisite to its accomplishment.

In the final part of this planning module we provide ideas for diagnosing students' skills - both informally and formally - and prescribing methods and materials for remediation or further progress toward the learning outcome. Of particular importance here are the advantages and disadvantages of various types of diagnoses.

As a bridge between the planning module and the instructional module, we again focus on the learner by considering Piaget's stages of cognitive development. Day 3 begins with participants examining the ways in which both maturation and experience affect students' readiness for particular learning experiences. Participants have an opportunity to examine some of the "givens" of education in terms of this theory and are asked to consider how many of those "givens" are "out of sync" with what we know about cognitive development.

At this point we take approximately one and one-half hours to pull together the concepts of learning styles, diagnosis and planning, and child development using a sample 4-MAT unit with the various EID components highlighted. Day 3 then moves to the fourth module, the instructional process itself, i.e., the interaction between the teacher and the learner. The day concludes with participants examining strategies for questioning and directing students to lead them toward higher level thinking skills (Bloom; 1956).

The instructional module continues on Day 4 with portions of the Madeline Hunter model (Hunter; 1982) - the need to focus the learners on what we want them to think about and the need to state learning expectations clearly. During the first two morning hours we stress the importance of checking for understanding through frequent informal assessments of student progress, and we discuss practical methods for teachers

to assess the extent to which students are mastering new information, skills, and processes. During the next two hours participants are asked to consider how students retain and transfer information in terms of metacognitive concepts. The ultimate concern here is the extent to which students retain information and transfer that information to new learning situations.

The afternoon provides a bridging activity between instruction and teacher collaboration as participants consider concepts of cooperative learning. This model is viewed first in terms of another teaching/learning option. However, it also sets the stage for participants to consider the need for teachers to cooperate with one another through professional collaboration, the final module of the EID program.

On Day 5 participants are asked to consider our limitations as educators in responding to learners' individual differences. Balancing the demands of the curriculum with the needs of the individual can be a monumental task. Yet, by pooling the vast array of resources at our disposal - classroom teachers, counselors, alternative education specialists, and others - we can bring a wealth of experience to bear on any given problem situation. During this module participants examine the key factors involved in effective collaboration and have an opportunity to practice the process through several simulations.

After completing the five EID modules, we expect participants to have a broadened foundation of information upon which to base their decisions regarding instruction. We recognize that each module of the program could become a course in itself, and we do not expect people to be experts after five "easy" lessons. Rather, it is

our intention to review some concepts and to introduce others which we believe enhance our ability to meet students' needs. We ask participants to use these concepts in their daily instructional activities. We also ask them to choose one area of particular interest for further study to be included in their yearly professional growth plan. In this way we hope to develop further the staff's expertise in various teaching/learning options.

IV. Results, Implications, and Conclusions

This strategic planning process has contributed significantly to school improvement in Clear Creek School District over the past two years. In 1988 the school district underwent the most successful accreditation audit in the history of Colorado Region I schools. The district received commendations from the Colorado Department of Education for receiving no exceptions from this audit which focused on long range planning, effectiveness of the accountability committee process, district goals, curriculum, staff certification, and other program issues.

In 1989-90 the yearly action planning component of the strategic planning process also changed appropriately according to the original plan established by the Board, DAAC, and superintendent. Instead of goals flowing from district to building, for the first time they originated at the building level with the BAAC and flowed to the district level where the DAAC and the superintendent developed methods to support the plans. That same year the curriculum development process moved into the area of alternative methods of evaluating student achievement, and 3 more groups of 12 teachers

participated in the EID program. For the first time educational assistants were also provided inservice training so that they could better support the district's newly created collaboration process.

During these past three years (1987-1990) all certificated staff members have participated in the strategic planning process through surveys and representation on the DAAC and BAAC. They have also participated directly in the curriculum development process. Approximately three-quarters of the certificated staff have participated in staff development through Enhancing Instructional Delivery, and more than half have participated in other miscellaneous staff development workshops and classes to provide teaching/learning options. All administrators have participated on a BAAC, all have served as resource persons on K-12 curriculum committees, and all have participated as planners and trainers for EID. All educational assistants have participated in two workshops pertaining to educational options with particular attention to at-risk students. All bus drivers attended a one day inservice on dealing with difficult children, and three who transported behaviorally disturbed students received one-on-one assistance from the school psychologist to develop strategies for handling them on a school bus.

Beyond these achievements several "spin-off" programs have also evolved because of the strategic planning process. These include an elementary developmental guidance program, a K-12 alternative education program for at-risk and gifted and talented students, a computer assisted drafting program, individual graduation programs for all high school students, and a postsecondary options partnership with a community college which allows high school juniors and seniors to earn one year of credit toward an

associate degree while attending high school.

Since the strategic planning process was implemented, teachers are using more varied teaching strategies, more learning options are available to students in the classroom through alternative programs and through higher education, high student attendance rates have been maintained, and the high school dropout rate has declined from 5.9% to 3.0% or less for two consecutive years.

This "sight-based" model for strategic planning is systematic without being cumbersome. It is designed to relate all aspects of the organization to a singular mission, "to provide opportunities for all individuals to develop the attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary to live happy, productive lives as citizens of the community, the state, the nation, and the world." It adheres to Peters' contention (1987) that "...plans and basic research are important, but frequent tests in small markets are more important." Rather than developing a districtwide thrust toward a particular curricular strategy or teaching model, e.g., outcome-based education, teachers are encouraged to look at what works for particular types of learners in various situations. As such, teachers truly become instructional decision makers.

EID, the staff development/how part of the process is merely an extension of this "options" concept. It has been designed to share research and various instructional innovations with teachers and to encourage them to explore their relationships and their practicality in the daily teaching/learning process. Teachers are reminded that they are instructional decision makers who must weigh curricular expectations against students' needs to determine how they can most effectively meet the district mission of educating

all students.

EID participants have evaluated the overall program at an average 3.5 level on a 4 point scale. Two teachers who participated in the EID program received recognition for an exemplary 4-MAT unit from the National Council for Learning Disabilities in 1989. At the high school all ninth grade students are assessed using the Learning Styles Inventory as a part of their individual graduation plans, and one high school teacher is currently on sabbatical leave studying the use of 4-MAT in various schools so that he can develop his own 4-MAT units for life science. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, in October, 1990 Clear Creek School District signed an agreement with Red Rocks Community College (Lakewood, Colorado) which provides options for eleventh and twelfth grade students to earn as much as one year's credit toward an associate degree prior to their graduation from high school.

The ultimate question, however, focuses on the extent to which these various learning options actually affect student achievement. Toward that end, the district is currently developing numerous evaluation procedures based once again on the district's mission. Because that mission emphasizes knowledge, skills, and attitudes as well as the need for all students to become life-long learners, the assessment battery will include standardized achievement test scores, writing assessments, measures of critical thinking and problem solving skills, and assessments of self-esteem, attitudes toward the arts, and various social skills. After completing this evaluation phase, we will have a more accurate picture of the long term impact of this strategic planning model based on the why, what, how, and to what extent questions posed at the beginning of this paper.

Appendix A

CLEAR CREEK SCHOOL DISTRICT RE-1
Planning Process

Step 1:

During the period from January through May of each year the Superintendent will obtain input in the formation of district goals from the District Accountability Advisory Committee (DAAC), the Administrators, the Teachers (including the teacher Communication Committee) and the Support Staff (including the Support Staff Communication Committee). To gain community-wide input, the DAAC shall complete a district-wide survey of the community at least every two years. The Superintendent will prepare explanatory data in support of the proposed goals including a forecast of necessary resources and information from accreditation audits. All information will be used to help the Superintendent and the School Board establish goals. After receiving input from these groups,the Superintendent will present the district goals to the School Board for their consideration.

The goals will be short term (to be accomplished in one or two years) and long term (to be accomplished in five years, being reviewed at least every two years). The School Board will set the long and short range goals for the School District. The Superintendent will then distribute these goals to the DAAC, the Administrators, the Teachers, other School Staff, and Committees that have been formed within the school district and will designate those individuals or groups that will be responsible for achieving the goals. The designated individuals or groups will be responsible for developing building/department action plans to achieve the district goals. These Action Plans will include objectives, planned activities and processes for meeting those objectives, timelines, methods of evaluation, and persons responsible for carrying out the plan.

Step 2:

The Principal of each school or the Director of a School District Program will be responsible for establishing the short and long term objectives for the individual schools/departments. The Principal/Director, in formulating objectives, will work with the Building Accountability Advisory Committee (BAAC) to obtain input from the community, the parents, the students attending the school, and the teachers teaching in the school and will include the input from these groups as a part of the objectives for the school.

The Superintendent shall bring to the first DAAC meeting in June the Objectives portion of the Action Plans prioritized from each building/department for implementation for the following year.

It will be the responsibility of the DAAC to assure that these objectives from the individual schools document students, parents, non-parent citizens and educators' involvement in the process of formulating those objectives.

Completed action plans from the identified groups are to be submitted to the Superintendent by October 1st of each year. Objectives must be prioritized by each principal/director and must include an estimated cost and identified resources. These objectives will be considered for implementation during the following school year. The DAAC will discuss the Objectives and Action Plans at their regularly scheduled meetings and solicit input from other elements of the school community as needed.

Step 3:

The Superintendent shall submit the prioritized Objectives and Action Plans to the School Board at the first Board meeting following October 1st. The Superintendent shall notify all Administrators of the Objectives and Action Plans that have been approved by October 15th.

Step 4:

The Superintendent shall meet with each Administrator by February 15th, to determine progress on Action Plans and to offer assistance where appropriate. By June 1st, the Administrators shall report in writing to the Superintendent the progress that has been made concerning their Objectives and will list possible causes of incomplete objectives along with proposed solutions. The Superintendent will then bring to the first DAAC meeting in June, information concerning progress on Objectives for the present school year. The DAAC will discuss this information and will provide input and assistance to the Superintendent regarding same. By August 1st the Superintendent will submit a written report advising the School Board on the progress that has been made on meeting objectives for that year as well as objectives that had completion dates set five years in advance.

Step 5:

The Superintendent shall at the first board meeting in November make any necessary recommendations for revisions of this planning process. Such recommendations will be based on information provided by the DAAC and any other groups mentioned herein.

NOTE: If the Accountability Committee's opinion differs with the Superintendent regarding proposed Goals and/or Objectives or the manner in which those objectives have been prioritized and/or achieved, it will be the Committee's obligation to present those views to the School Board.

Appendix B

EID Schedule

Day 1	Learning Styles and 4-MAT
Day 2	4-MAT and Planning
Day 3	Child Development/Piaget and Questioning Strategies
Day 4	Madeline Hunter, Metacognition, and Cooperative Learning
Day 5	Collaboration and Wrap-up

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